



# Focus on Site Hazard Assessment

from Ecology's Program, Toxics Cleanup

Under the Model Toxics Control Act, one of the first steps in the process for cleaning up a hazardous waste site is a Site Hazard Assessment. During a site hazard assessment, the Department of Ecology collects environmental data about a site to determine the type and extent of contamination. If further action is needed, Ecology ranks the site using the Washington Ranking Method (WARM) and places it on the *Hazardous Sites List*.

## Assessing the Potential Hazard

A site hazard assessment provides preliminary data regarding the potential hazard of a site. The main purpose of a site hazard assessment is to provide sufficient sampling data and other information to:

- Confirm or rule out contamination
- Identify the hazardous substance(s)
- Identify environmental characteristics associated with the site
- Evaluate the potential threats to human health and the environment

In addition, the site hazard assessment provides enough information to allow Ecology to rank the site's potential hazard relative to other sites on the *Hazardous Sites List*. This helps Ecology determine which sites should be worked on first. It is important to note that a hazard assessment is not intended to be a detailed site study or assessment of the health risk posed by a site.

## Is a Site Hazard Assessment Always Necessary?

No, for a variety of reasons, a site hazard assessment may not always be necessary at a site. For example, sites doing independent cleanups and requesting Ecology consultation under the voluntary cleanup program would not normally need a site hazard assessment. In general, Ecology will conduct a site hazard assessment on sites that are anticipated to require significant future staff resources, since the assessment helps in setting workload priorities.

## What Information Is Needed To Accurately Assess a Site?

Although a site hazard assessment is not intended to be a detailed site characterization, it includes sampling results from various locations on and around the site, site observations, maps and historical information. Specifically, a site hazard assessment should include:

1. Evidence confirming a release or threatened release of a hazardous substance.
2. Identification of the hazardous substances and their location, including what was or may be released and, if applicable, what products of decomposition, recombination or chemical reaction are currently present at the site.
3. A description of the facilities containing the substances and their condition.
4. Consideration of surface water run-on or run-off and the possibility of contaminants seeping through the surface and contaminating ground water.
5. Characterization of sub-surface and ground water, including the depth to ground water and distance to nearby wells, bodies of surface water and drinking water supplies.



6. An evaluation of human population, food crops, recreation areas, sensitive environments, irrigated areas and aquatic resources.
7. Any other factors which may be significant in estimating exposure of sensitive environments to hazardous waste.

## What Happens After the Hazard Assessment?

The environmental information collected through the site hazard assessment process is used to “score” the primary exposure routes through which contaminants could pose a risk to human health and the environment. These include surface water, air and ground water. Each exposure route is then evaluated to determine the relative risk at each site and the final ranking for each site. Sites are ranked on a scale of 1 to 5 using the Washington Ranking Method, with a ranking of 1 representing the highest level of potential risk and 5 the lowest. The rankings represent an estimation of the potential threat posed by a site compared to all other assessed/ranked sites in the state.

Ecology will provide results from the site hazard assessment to site owners, operators and other potentially liable persons. If the department determines, after the assessment, that no further action is required at the site, it will notify the public through Ecology’s *Site Register*.

## How Can I Get More Information?

If you are interested in finding out more about a specific site or to find out which sites in your area will be assessed in the near future, call the regional office in which the site is located:

**N.W. Regional Office** (Island, King, Kitsap, San Juan, Skagit, Snohomish, Whatcom Counties) 425-649-7000

**S.W. Regional Office** (Clallam, Cowlitz, Grays Harbor, Jefferson, Lewis, Mason, Pacific, Pierce, Skamania, Thurston, Wahkiakum Counties) 360-407-6300

**Central Regional Office** (Benton, Chelan, Douglas Kittitas, Klickitat, Okanogan, Yakima Counties) 509-575-2490

**Eastern Regional Office** (Adams, Asotin, Columbia, Ferry, Franklin, Garfield, Grant, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Spokane, Stevens, Walla Walla, Whitman Counties) 509-329-3400

For additional information on the Site Hazard Assessment/ Warm Ranking process contact: Michael J. Spencer 360-407-7195

Ecology’s Site Register contains status and ranking information about sites. You can request to be placed on the Site Register mailing list by contacting: 360-407-7170 or 1-800-826-7716

Staff can be reached at the following address: Department of Ecology  
Toxics Cleanup Program  
P.O. Box 47600  
Olympia, WA 98504-7600

Or visit our website: [www.ecy.wa.gov](http://www.ecy.wa.gov)

This focus sheet is intended to help the user understand the Model Toxics Control Act Cleanup Regulation, Chapter 173-340 WAC. It does not establish or modify regulatory requirements

*If you require this publication in an alternate format, please contact Toxics Cleanup Program at (360) 407-7170 or (TTY) at 711 or 1-800-833-6388.*